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April 28, 1973

HONORING THE LAW

Daniel Webster once said of the law: "It has honored us; may we honor it." Not one other human achievement deserves to be honored more. Great men have always understood that the law and the law alone is civilization's one great hope. Aristotle knew that law means order and that good order comes only through good law. Goethe (gurth-ah) knew that only law can bring freedom, and John Locke told us that "wherever law ends, tyranny begins." We should honor the law; it is proper that we honor it just as it was proper for those ancient peoples who founded our civilization to honor Solon and Moses because they were the law givers.

This nation especially should honor the law because here the noble concept of a government of laws rather than a government of men was first realized. It is here that the noble ideal of government receiving its just powers from the consent of the governed was first instituted. And it is here that the noble dreams of the equality of man and of justice and liberty for all first became truths. We all know that 'equality and justice are the two distinguishing characteristics of American democracy' (Hutchins), that to be ruled by

law this nation must give "equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion" (Jefferson), and that in this nation, without equality under the law, there can be no justice.

For what is justice but giving every man his due? True Americans must all agree with Lincoln when he said that 'there is no grievance that is a fit object of redress by mob" and with Theodore Roosevelt when he said that 'obedience to the law is demanded as a right; not asked as a favor." Only if the law is honored can this nation and our people hope to prosper and regain a position of moral leadership in the community of nations.

If peace and justice for all peoples are to be had in this world, moral, international, and domestic law must each be honored---honored with deeds, not just with words.

The young and the disenchanted are the first to catch us whenever our actions do not match our words, and they shall always answer with Emerson, "Don't say things. What you are stands over you the while, and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary." So we must ask ourselves: Do our actions agree with our words?

We teach our children the commandment thou shalt not kill; yet the theme of violence is our main source of entertainment on television, in our motion picture theatres, in the comics of our daily papers, and in many of our books. And although thousands of persons are killed and injured on our highways each year, we continue to violate our motor vehicle laws, often without a second thought. Surely something is wrong here. Do we believe that thou shalt not kill or do we not?

We teach our children the commandments thou shalt not steal nor bear false witness, but we propagate the widespread notion that in making money anything goes, and cheating on our tax returns is a national practice? Do we believe these commandments or do we not?

We teach our children the commandment thou shalt not commit adultery, but we glorify it in our magazines, books, and films. Just what is our faith in this commandment?

When we violate these commandments as often as we do, why are we so surprised whenever our children fail to honor us, their parents? And if in our actions we do not show respect for the law we call God's, what respect for man's law can we hope for? Have we not contributed to disrespect for the law whenever we fail to teach our children the fundamental principles upon which our system of government and especially our legal

system are based, and whenever we fail to teach our children the moral ideals of our society? And do we not contribute to disrespect for the law whenever we fail to live up to our teachings? So long as we continue to act as we do, we cannot teach respect for the law to our young and to those in our society who do not share in its advantages. And unless we can teach respect for the law to our young and the disadvantaged, they shall always be ripe to the prey of the disgruntled who agitate and who would be unhappy in any society that they are not the masters of.

We must change the minds of those people who agree with Charles Dickens' Mr. Bumble who said "the law is an ass and an idiot." If the law is to be honored as it deserves once again in this great nation of ours, we must convince those who disrespect it that it is worthy of their respect, and we can best do that by obeying and respecting it ourselves.

To honor the law properly, we must be reasonable men of good will, for only when law is both reasonable and generous will it---like the moral law---command the respect it deserves; only when the law recompenses injury with justice will law have the support of the people, and as one writer stated, "Law will never be strong and respected unless it has the sentiment of the people behind it."

Let us then teach respect for international and domestic law in the way in which we teach respect for the moral law. For no system, however, well-staffed or organized, no level of material well being for all, will rid a society of disrespect for law if it lacks a widespread ethical foundation.

"We were a God-fearing people at one time and proud of it" (Blatt). We must be that again if we expect to see respect for law prevail, for law is nothing more than a rule dictated by reason.

The law has been a gift of great benefit to men. It has shown men how to be moral, for our moral code is expressed in the law we call God's. It has shown us how to be civilized, for as philosophers like Hobbes and Locke have shown, men without law are men who live in a perpetual state of war. The law has shown us how to resolve disputes between men without their having to resort to force, and it has shown us that men---like Solomon---can be wise and honest judges regardless of their personal inclinations. As it has been said (Johnson), "the law is the last result of human wisdom acting upon human experience for the benefit of the people."

The law has shown us how to regulate our commerce so that the goods of life can be given to the greatest number, and it has shown us how to regulate our affairs so that we do not unduly interfere with the affairs of others. In short, the law has shown us how to be free and just. "Justice is the tolerable accommodation of the conflicting interests of society" (Hand) and 'equality and justice are the principles of freedom' (Page). These are the benefits of the law, and for these it deserves to be championed and obeyed. Those who reject them are merely impractical.

Would we have it another way? What would life for the weaker be like if the stronger always prevailed? What would life for the needy be like if commerce could not be regulated? And what would life for everyone be like if everyone's affairs interfered with our own? I submit that life would not be worth living.

The law is man's noble possession; upon it all civilization is built. If civilization is to be preserved and advanced, the law must be honored by obedience, and this is what we must teach those who disrespect it. The ills of this world cannot be cured in unreasonable and impractical ways; unreasonable and impractical treatments can only compound the illnesses of society. Let us then by honoring and obeying



And we must remember that 'our best defense is not in armaments, nor in science, nor in going underground. Our best defense is in law and order' (Einstein), and our greatest weakness in disrespect for the law.

Thank you.